

The Old College Tattershall

The Old College is a rare survival of a medieval collegiate grammar school and one of the earliest brick buildings in England. It is also important as part of Ralph, Lord Cromwell's great building programme at Tattershall. It is a scheduled monument and a Grade II* listed building and is protected by government legislation.

The building probably owes its survival to the fact that it continued in use into the early 20th century. However, its use changed over time, and these changes necessitated alterations to its fabric. Major alterations were made in the late 18th century when the building was converted to a maltings. Some of these are still visible today and are considered important as evidence of the building's history.

Roof timbers removed in the early 1970s

New wall constructed in the 1970s

Joist holes created by the insertion of a middle floor in the late 18th century

Original ground level. Lowered to create a cellar in the late 18th century

Remains of joists supporting the upper floor

Blocked late 18th century openings associated with the conversion of the building to a maltings. They provided access to the cellar and to the middle floor

Original window enlarged in the late 18th century to create a doorway into the upper storey from the head of a flight of external steps

Late 18th century steps (now demolished) providing access to the upper floor

During the 20th century the condition of the building deteriorated to the extent that in 1972 it was taken into the care of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. The decision was made to remove the roof and the structural timbers in order to create a 'safe ruin'. This may have been for economic reasons, but it also reflects the approach at the time to the long-term sustainable management of such buildings.

At the same time, the buildings adjoining the Old College to the south were demolished and its resulting open end was closed with the modern brick wall that you see today. Other openings were also filled in the same way. Although the size of the bricks matches the medieval ones, and they are laid in the same English bond, the new brickwork is strikingly different to the original. This type of visible intervention in the historic fabric would not be adopted today.

While modern additions and repairs would not pretend to be part of the historic structure, they would tend to be much more sympathetic to the original, and the Old College therefore serves as an excellent illustration of how conservation philosophy has changed over the years. In the future the modern alterations may even come to be regarded as important in their own right as part of the history of the building?

